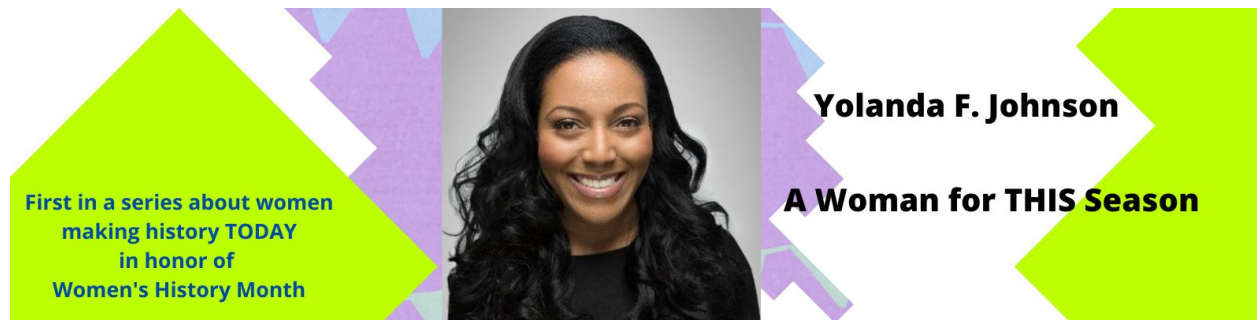


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<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/woman-season-andrea-pactor>

A Woman for THIS Season

by Andrea Pactor

RETIRED, Associate Director at Women's Philanthropy Institute



Meet Yolanda F. Johnson, a professional lyric opera singer and philanthropy leader turned serial social entrepreneur. She is a dreamer. She is a doer. She is creating communities to address racial and gender equity in philanthropy. She is also a fundraising consultant who believes that “fundraisers are the beacons of light and hope that illuminate the path to the good work needed in the world today.” Above all, she wants “for everyone to find their place to do good work, to realize their gifts and talents to work for good.” Yolanda F. Johnson is a woman making history today.

For Yolanda, performing and fundraising have always gone together. As an undergraduate she accepted the challenge to organize the first gala for the School of Music at the University of Tulsa where she received a BA in Voice. Then, she honed her fundraising skills with an MA in Arts Administration from the University of Akron. In her music, she is focused on women and women of color as artists. In her consulting life, she is focused on women of color in fundraising and philanthropy. Always a teacher and mentor, Yolanda created All the World's a Stage, a workshop that applies performance techniques to help fundraisers build confidence and strengthen communication skills.

Fast forward to 2018 when Yolanda, the first African American President of Women in Development (WID), NY in its then 40 year history, and immediate past president Brooke Bryant, established a two-year Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. The Task Force identified three goals: to increase membership of women of color in WID; to create and encourage an inclusive culture; and to create visibility through leadership around diversity and inclusion in philanthropy. With a final report and implementation of new ideas and strategies in hand, Yolanda transitioned the task force into the Inclusion, Equity, and Diversity Committee.



Yolanda states that change has to be organic, that it starts with the individual, and occurs in incremental steps. Examples of the tactical changes now in place at WID that are resulting in peoples' behavioral changes are: DEI programming such as a panel of women of color to talk about diversifying staffs and boards; DEI-related partnerships; collection of demographic data to better understand and serve their members; including the voices of women of color in WID's advice column in the e-newsletter and on the website; and at least one book discussion about access and inequality as part of WID's book group. Another example of Yolanda's innate ability to share, teach, and mentor is her powerful article about the WID experience with DEI, "How We Are Creating Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion From the Inside Out" which appeared in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* in June 2020.



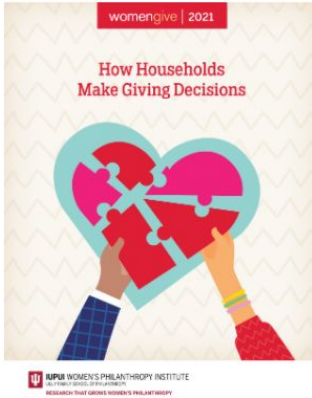
From that experience and the feedback she received from women of color, Yolanda recognized there was more to do. Sensing a keen need among women of color in fundraising and philanthropy to have a safe space to learn, to grow, and to thrive, Yolanda described her journey to create Women of Color in Fundraising and Philanthropy (WOC/pronounced "woke") in a compelling article for AFP's *Advancing Philanthropy*. Quickly, WOC membership grew to nearly 1,000 members nationally and globally.

Deepening WOC's learning community, Yolanda launched the Radiant Leadership Institute in February 2021 to "inspire and equip courageous influencers to shape and lead 21st century organizations." The first cohort of 26 women are engaging in a four-month learning journey with a holistic approach that addresses among other topics financial literacy, health, well-being, and philanthropy and provides an opportunity for participants to have a one-year board fellowship on a nonprofit board. A personal experience motivated Yolanda to develop the Radiant Leadership Institute. She once accepted an invitation to serve on a nonprofit board of directors and soon realized she was the only woman of color on that board. The Institute is designed to help build the pipeline of women of color to serve in leadership positions across the nonprofit sector.

In response to the question non-people of color asked, "What can I do to help?," Yolanda created Allies in Action, a membership network for "non-people of color to unite in solidarity, taking action to champion, support and celebrate women of color in fundraising and philanthropy." With its four focus areas of education, legislation, inclusion, and action, Allies in Action has grown rapidly to more than 150 members across the U.S. and Canada. Illustrative of Yolanda's commitment to "walk the talk," Allies in Action raised more than \$20,000 in 2020 to support organizations and programs serving women and girls of color.

Yolanda defines herself as a dreamer and says she is able to build these communities because she has an amazing team that keeps everything going. That is not the entire story. The same skills and acuity that make her a wonderful opera singer – passion, discipline, intentionality, a deliberate approach, and creativity – are embedded in her philanthropic leadership. Additionally, skilled fundraisers know that relationships are the essence of fundraising. As a seasoned fundraiser, Yolanda has taken relationship building to a new level to create strong communities that fill gaps, meet the needs of those around her, and that provide paths forward for "everyone to do good work." The philanthropic sector is richer for her leadership. As Yolanda says, "Onward, Upward, Forward!"





Yolanda joins the Women’s Philanthropy Institute as a panelist at the launch of its newest research study, How Households Make Giving Decisions, on March 16, 2021. The program, from 1:00 – 2:00 pm ET, includes presentation of the research and panelists who will discuss implications for donors, families, nonprofits, advisors, and fundraisers. Register to attend today.

If you agree with Yolanda that fundraisers are beacons of light, visit PhilanthroTees to see how the message looks on specially designed t-shirts. Listen to Yolanda sing spirituals on YouTube. Yolanda is a multi-talented, visionary leader. She is a woman for THIS season; she is a woman for ALL seasons.